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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: DHRF GRANT IMPROVES PRISONERS' PLIGHT IN
EKITI

1. (SBU) Summary: A March 12, 2008 workshop funded by a 2007 Democracy and Human Rights Fund (DHRF) grant, and coordinated by the New Initiative for Social Development (NISD), brought together representatives of the prisons service, police, judges and other stakeholders to discuss issues related to prisoners awaiting trial in Ekiti State. Participants agreed that increasing legal aid to prisoners, speeding up investigations of cases by police, and increasing the number of judges available to hear cases would address many of the problems. As a direct result of the workshop, NISD was able to arrange bail and release for ten prisoners. End Summary.

2. (SBU) A March 12 workshop entitled "Stakeholders in Access to Justice for Prisoners Awaiting Trial in Ekiti State", coordinated by the New Initiative for Social Development (NISD), brought together representatives of the prisons service, police, judges and others to facilitate prisoner case review. A 2007 Democracy and Human Rights Fund (DHRF) grantee, NISD's Executive Director Abiodun Oyeleye told PolOff, PolSpec and the Ambassador's Special Self Help Coordinator (SSHC) March 12, that NISD wanted to bring coherence to an overburdened prison and justice system. Overpopulation is a significant problem for Nigerian prisons, Oyeleye said, adding that the slow justice system and high costs of trials exacerbate prison overcrowding. The facilities are inadequate; juveniles are often kept with adults and women are often kept with men; defense lawyers are scarce and not well-trained; and there are not enough judges to hear all the cases in a timely manner, Oyeleye concluded.

3. (SBU) Workshop objectives included: getting stakeholders to understand the rights of prisoners; developing a better understanding of the present condition of the prisons in Ado-Ekiti; identifying and understanding factors linking access to justice for prisoners awaiting trial; and making appropriate suggestions and developing a work plan of action to accelerate justice for prisoners awaiting trial. All organizations handling prisoners, from the police who make the initial arrest to the judge who finally rules on the case, were represented at the workshop. Sam Anjorinap, Assistant Controller for the Ekiti State Prisons, said that although the Ado-Ekiti Prison was built by the British before Nigeria's independence and designed to hold 200 inmates, it now holds 290 prisoners. Anjorinap assured the stakeholders that prison officials did their best to meet international standards for the care of prisoners; other attendees disagreed with this assessment. Foluke Adebayo, NISD, defined what rights prisoners have while incarcerated, citing

Chapter Four of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, saying that if all the rights available to prisoners were enforced, their nationwide living conditions would improve. Oyeleye described the prison service in Nigeria as one of the most neglected agencies of government at both the federal and state levels, lacking funding, staff and equipment.

¶4. (SBU) Stakeholders agreed on next steps including increasing the number of visits to prisons by police investigators to speak with suspects, increasing legal aid available to prisoners, and lobbying for more judges in the state to hear cases. The most important result of the conference, Oyeleye said, was that the stakeholders had come together to communicate honestly about the problem and all understood each others' position better.

¶5. (SBU) April 14, Oyeleye told PolOff that, as a result of this conference, NISD was able to arrange bail and release for ten prisoners. Oyeleye told PolOff that information shared at the conference, coupled with increased trust and cooperation resulting from conference interactions, directly contributed to NISD's ability to help these prisoners.

¶6. Special Self-Help/DHRF Coordinator Mary Hess contributed to this cable.

¶7. This cable has been cleared by Embassy Abuja.

BLAIR